Memorandum of the Executive Committee on Party Organisation

March, 1945.

At the 17th Party Congress an Organisation Commission was set up to examine Party Organisation. On the basis of its report the Executive Committee circulated proposals for discussion throughout the Party.

This memorandum is the final result of those discussions adopted by the Executive Committee on February 18th, 1945.

Appropriate amendments to the Party Rules will be submitted to the 18th Party Congress.

In the period following victory over Fascism, the main questions arising will centre around the extension of all forms of democracy, not only in the electoral field but also in the increased participation of the people in the solution of industrial and social problems. This will give rise to tremendous opportunities for stimulating the democratic activities of the people where they live, where they work, and in their mass organisations.

In this situation what kind of Party organisation shall we need ? What forms of struggle will emerge in which we must take an active and leading part ? The experience of the years of the war will help us to answer these questions.

Throughout the war we have seen the triumph of Marxism. We have seen a great Socialist state play a leading role in the destruction of Fascism. We have seen in each country Communists playing an outstanding part in helping to weld together and unify all forces of resistance. We have seen Communists taking their place in the Governments of Europe's liberated countries, and by their constructive proposals helping to carry out a policy which is laying the foundation of a new democratic Europe linked in friendship with the Soviet Union, Britain and America.

Our Party has a similar contribution to make. Based on Marxism, firmly taking hold of what is new, recognising the need for alert grappling with the concrete problems of the day, our Party can strengthen the British Labour movement, can increase the active interest and participation of the people in the management of their affairs, and can help to strengthen and extend British democracy and enable Britain to play its part amongst the nations in the new world.

But to do this we must progress rapidly in our building of a mass Party. We must win affiliation to the Labour Party. We must remove the bans that still exist against Communists in the Labour movement. We can do this only if we set out consciously to remove all those obstacles which prevent us from recruiting and holding thousands of men and women whose sympathies are entirely with us. There must be a new and wider conception of what we mean by "Party activity," so that many more comrades can make a valuable contribution to our Party in their normal sphere of work.

Following an examination of the work of Party organisations throughout the last few months it is clear that there are organisational changes which will facilitate the growth and effectiveness of our Party in the coming period, and the unanimous welcome given to the original proposals is an indication of the recognition in all Party organisations that these changes are now immediately necessary in order to achieve our political objectives, by making our policy widely known, winning support for it, and constantly recruiting to our Party.

CHANGES IN PARTY ORGANISATION

Summary.

(i) The Branch to be the basic unit of the Party, covering all members residing in the locality, wherever they work. Activity in factories to be led by Party factory committees, without regular meetings of other Party members in the factory. Activity in the locality to be led by the Branch Committee, which will group the membership in whatever way helps organised activity in various spheres.

(ii) Large Branches to be divided where there is a good basis for this in membership and experienced leading comrades.

(iii) Where there are several Branches in a Borough or City, a Borough or City Committee to be set up, composed partly of delegates from the Branches.

(iv) Area Committees to lead the work of the Branches, to be set up at the discretion of the District Committee ; such Area Committees to be composed partly of delegates from the Branches.

(v) The delegate principle also to apply in the composition of District Committees.

A more detailed explanation of each point is given below.

The Branch.

1. The basic unit of the Party to be the Branch, composed of all members resident in the branch area.

2. Branches shall be organised on the authority of the District Committee, to cover an area which is a natural existing community of the people. Thus full branch status should be given to Communist Party organisations in villages and similar communities.

3. Where the main community divisions are too large for a single Party Branch, then, at the discretion of the District Committee, it is recommended that Party Branches are organised to cover a natural section of the main community, such as a ward, constituency, etc.

4. It is necessary to give careful consideration to the stage at which such a dividing-up of a large Branch takes place, since a mechanical application of this recommendation can lead to the creation of weak and unsatisfactory branches. We, therefore, do not recommend such action being taken unless there is a minimum of 50 members to form each new Branch, together with cadres able to take the responsibility of leadership. In all cases decisions should be taken based upon the *experiences in the particular area*, since there are many local circumstances which must be taken into account.

Such conditions do not, of course, apply to the establishment of Branches in villages and other new areas, as explained under (2).

5. Subject to the careful consideration of these points we believe that the division of large Branches into smaller units with a more simplified method of organisation is correct.

6. The Branch should hold a regular monthly branch meeting, at a fixed time each month, dealing with current questions as well as with aspects of policy and the development of local campaigns. This meeting must be organised so that it is a political event locally, interesting to both members and non-members, with a report on the development of the Branch work by the secretary, and with the opportunity to raise issues without a feeling that this is upsetting the agenda or "against the line." These points have been made in previous statements on Party Organisation and it is essential to make strenuous efforts to ensure the operation of these proposals.

7. Where there are several Branches within a main community division we recommend the establishment of a co-ordinating committee, henceforth called a City or Borough Committee, and the functions of these bodies and their relation to their constituent Branches is dealt with in a subsequent section.

Organisation in the Factory.

1. In order to maintain and extend our work in the factories, Party Factory Committees, elected annually by the Party comrades in the factory or enterprise, must be set up. The function of these Committees will be to apply the general line of the Party in the industry, to consult with and give guidance to the members in the factory, in order that they may strengthen and develop the Trade Union and factory organisations, especially with a view to drawing the mass of the workers into participation in all decisions. Such Committees have the right and responsibility to call meetings of the members in the factory where the situation makes this necessary or where the members desire it. In order to enable the Factory Committee to do this it is the responsibility of every Branch Committee to exchange information about members employed in other Branch areas. Such information will also assist Branches to develop factory organisation in new factories where none at present exists. It is the duty of the Party Factory Committee to keep an accurate and up-to-date register of the Party members in the enterprise, their addresses and Party Branches, etc.

2. The direction of the Factory Committees to be the responsibility of the local Branch in the case of local enterprises, of the Borough or City or Area Committee where the enterprise is a major enterprise of the whole area in question, and of the District Committee in particular cases where the enterprise is of special importance and where other special circumstances exist. The District Committee is responsible for determining where responsibility should rest in each case.

3. Apart from those comrades elected to the Party Factory Committee and whose main responsibility will be to this Committee and to activity in the factory, special questions arise for the other comrades working in the factory, but not on the Factory Committees. These comrades will not have regular meetings at the factory to attend, and will, of course, like the comrades who comprise the Factory Committee, be members of the Branch where they live and will thus have their dues collected by that Branch. They have the responsibility of consulting with the Party Factory Committee on questions arising in the factory and of carrying out agreed policy, and as Party members they will naturally express the Party's policy among the other workers in the factory; they will lend or sell literature to other workers who are interested; they will make meetings known, sell tickets and collect donations; and above all, they will try to win supporters and recruits for the Party in the factory. But they will do this as members of their Branch, obtaining their literature through their literature secretary in the Factory Committee or from their Branch, according to custom and convenience in the particular area. In some cases where successful arrangements are at present in existence it may be necessary to maintain the system of quotas in particular factories, but this must be worked out according to the local circumstances. Their organisation on a Branch instead of a Factory Group basis should not weaken their Party activity at the factory; but after working hours their main concern should be to participate in the life of the area where they live, which in most cases will be far easier and more natural for them than attending meetings or classes at the factory.

Responsibilities of Branch Leadership and of the Party Member.

The rights, duties and obligations of Party members remain as specified in Rule 3:—

> "Membership shall be open to persons of eighteen years and upwards who agree with the aims of the Party, pay their dues regularly, and work in a Party organisation.
>
> "Members have not only the right but the duty to take part in the formation of the policy of the Party through their Party organisation, and in the election of all leading Committees.
>
> "Every member shall belong to and assist in the work of his or her appropriate Trade Union or professional organisation and Co-operative Society.
>
> "Members, with the assistance of the Party, shall strive to improve their political knowledge, and understanding of Marxist theory, to equip themselves to take an active and helpful part in the working-class movement, and win support for the aims and policy of the Party."

We particularly emphasise the responsibility of the membership in relation to their participation in the work of their Trade Union and Co-operative organisations.

We wish, however, specially to call attention to the responsibility of the Branch leadership for providing the maximum opportunity and encouragement to members to take part in activity.

We consider that the increased size and responsibility of the Party, together with the organisational changes proposed, require a new approach by Party members and Branch Committees to the methods of work and the forms of political activity which they undertake.

This does not mean abandoning the forms of activity on which the Party has been built up; the organisation of meetings and classes, literature selling, and agitation on particular issues in the factories or in the wards and Branches. On the contrary, these forms of activity must be continued and intensified; but they must be given a wider basis and more effective results by other forms of political activity which carry us far beyond those sections influenced by us in the past.

The broadening of our work is also linked up with the better use of our Party members, the connections which they have, and their individual interests and abilities. Branch Committees should build on the interests, abilities and connections of all Party members, so that the winning of recruits to the Party does not result in narrowing their activities to some existing and limited sphere of "Party work," but leads to their greater and more conscious activity in spheres where they have connections and already developed interests.

The attitude to new members, or to members who are regarded as "inactive" because they do not attend Party meetings regularly or do not sell literature, must be changed. It is their

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duty, as we are confident it is also their wish, to study and understand the general policy of the Party, and to carry that policy to the circles with whom they are naturally in touch. But the circles with whom they are in touch, and their methods of working among them, should be regarded as extending the influence and work of the Party, and not as something other than "Party work." The responsibility of the Branch Committee should be to note their connections and interests, to learn from their experiences and initiativo, to encourage them to work in an organised way with other Party members in that sphere, and to help and advise them to solve difficulties that arise.

Experience has shown that it is necessary for special provision to be made for women comrades, particularly housewives who cannot take part in ordinary meetings, by the organisation of special afternoon meetings with facilities for looking after children where this is necessary, and with full opportunities for carrying out activities which are of special interest to them.

In some areas it has also been found that, where local tradition favours such a development, the recruiting of women to the Party and their participation in political activity is made more successful by the organisation of women's sections with separate meetings at convenient times, and undertaking special activities of interest to women. The success of such sections, however, depends on local circumstances and cadres, and these should be taken into account before Branch Committees decide to set them up.

The principal aim of the Branch Committee should be to encourage Party members to associate with others in the normal life of the community, while always carrying the Party outlook and policy to those with whom they are in touch. This means that Party members should be encouraged not only to be members of the Trade Union and Co-operatives, but of local clubs or societies in which they take an interest. What is expected of Party members in the way of activity should not be rigid or seen from a narrow organisational standpoint. With regular dues payment as the basis, for which the Branch has the responsibility of organising dues collectors, comrades should be expected to develop their activity along the lines in which they are most interested. It is the responsibility of the Branch Committee to give assistance to their membership to work in this way, and, according to the stage of development of the Branch, the growth of its membership, etc., to find convenient methods of organising comrades for activity.

Such methods would include the development of groups of comrades concentrating upon a particular area within a Branch (a ward, an estate, a street, as the case may be), and there building our membership and strengthening our influence. Where at present functioning ward groups exist in areas where there is the perspective of ultimately building a Branch in that ward, then these should be continued, to organise the work in the ward.

This does not mean that all the members who live in a particular area are necessarily expected to work in this way, although as voters they must be known to the comrades working in the area. Some comrades may wish to take part in other forms of activity, and this it is the responsibility of the Branch Committee to organise.

To bring about these changes in Branch activity, Branch Committees will need to be composed of those comrades who themselves have experience and interest in the life of the particular community, as well as the ability to give political leadership.

The Co-ordinating City or Borough Committee.

1. Where a number of Branches exist within one main community division, as previously described, we recommend the creation of co-ordinating committees, to be called City or Borough Committees, elected on a delegate principle from the constituent Branches and important factories, together with a number of comrades engaged in public activities on a Borough or City scale, and in addition, with necessary officers whose responsibility would be to the Committee. Such officers would form the basis of a small Executive Committee.

2. Such a Committee would meet monthly and would discuss, plan and co-ordinate work in relation to those questions which affect the Borough or City as a whole, but would not be responsible for the organisation of the membership.

3. In some large cities, with a number of Party Branches and a very big population involved, the City Committee would take on the character and status of an Area Committee, as defined in the next section.

The Area Committee.

In a number of major districts, there have already been established Area Committees (or sub-district committees) covering natural political, social and economic divisions of the district, and directly responsible to the District Committee for applying and developing Party policy in the area, for the direction of the Branches within the area, for Party Organisation, finance, etc.

We believe that the setting up of Area Committees is a correct development on the following basis :—

1. All forms of organisation have to be considered in terms of the urgent necessity for strengthening *the Branch and the Branch leaderships* and for building up the higher committees on the basis of strong Branches.

2. Experience has shown the danger of prematurely trying to create large Area Committees, and drawing away Branch cadres out of relation to the situation in particular Branches.

3. Experience has also shown that where these considerations have been taken into account and Area Committees formed on the basis of sufficient development of the Party forces in the area, then this can have a very great value in enabling closer attention and guidance to the Branches concerned, and a corresponding development in the Party forces and influence throughout the Area.

We, therefore, recommend :—

In London, Scotland, Wales, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Midlands—

(*a*) The development of Area Committees, based on natural political, social and economic divisions as determined by the District Committee.

(*b*) These Area Committees to be directly responsible to the District Committees for applying and developing policy in their Area, and for Party organisation, finance, etc.

(*c*) The composition of these Area Committees to be based upon the delegate principle from Branches and important factories, with an additional number of comrades elected because of their contribution in various aspects of life in the Area, together with the necessary officers, whose main responsibility would be the work of the Committee.

(*d*) No attempt would be made to lay down any rule upon the exact proportion of delegates and other comrades on the Committee, nor of how delegates would be elected, but the general interpretation of this principle left to the District Committee to decide according to local circumstances.

In some cases, for example, delegates would necessarily be elected from the Borough or City Committees covering a number of Branches.

In the other Districts.

(*a*) In a very few cases there are local conditions and sufficient development of forces which may make it possible and desirable to set up small Area Committees on the lines described above, in consultation with Party Centre.

(*b*) In most places, however, this situation does not as yet exist, but within many of the Districts it is necessary to see this as a line of development for which preparatory work is needed by leading comrades, particularly full-time comrades, giving special attention to natural groupings of Branches covering an area which will merit the formation of a Party Area Committee when the forcess are sufficiently developed for this purpose.

(*c*) This question is dealt with further in the section dealing with the District Committees in these districts.

The District Committee.

In London, Scotland, Wales, Lancashire, Midlands Yorkshire.

1. In these districts it is clearly established that it is necessary to have a strong centralised policy-making Committee with general controlling authority throughout the Area. It was suggested that at a later stage these might be called Councils, but we do not make this recommendation until there is a further development in the rest of the country, and they are referred to throughout this document as District Committees.

2. We recommend that some part of these District Committees are elected on a delegate principle from the Area Committees, with an additional number of comrades elected at the Annual Congress. In considering the composition of the Committee care must be taken to limit the proportion of full-time comrades.

In England other than the areas mentioned.

In the rest of England it is desirable to work towards the development of District Committees covering a larger area than most of the smaller Districts as at present constituted, and within these areas forming Area Committees on the basis as previously described in an earlier section.

It was felt, however, that in relation to existing forces, it would be impossible and undesirable to attempt the formation of such bodies at the present time, although some improvements in the present situation are needed.

The following recommendations were made for general application in these Areas. In addition, special consideration would have to be given to the smaller Districts with only one or two full-time staff, where a number of special problems exist—

(i) Emphasis to be placed upon the development of the *Branch*; then, where this becomes necessary, the *City or Borough Committee*; and then, as and when this development becomes possible, *the Area Committee* on the basis previously described.

(ii) The existing concentration in District Centres of full-time staff with departmental responsibilities to be reviewed. The aim should be in the direction of placing more emphasis on full-time comrades in parts of the District, with all-round responsibilities.

(iii) The District Secretary and such assistants as are required at the District Office to have all-round responsibility for the development of the Party work in the District.

(iv) The District Committee to be elected at the Annual District Congress and to be based upon delegates from the main Branches and from convenient groupings of Branches, together with a number of comrades from whom the officers should be drawn and be responsible for co-ordinating the policy and activity of the Branches in the Area, and for working towards the formation of Area Committees in the appropriate areas of the District, in agreement with the Party Centre.

The Structure of the Party Summarised.

(i) The Party Branch as the basic unit of the Party.

(ii) City or Borough Committees, where necessary.

(iii) Area Committees, where necessary.

(iv) District Committees.

(v) Executive Committee.

Methods of Work and Character of Leadership.

The above proposals will necessitate a further examination of the methods of work and character of leadership of the leading Committees of the Party, and proposals for further work on this question are contained in a subsequent section.

The following points were made as preliminary guiding principles :—

(i) It is necessary to emphasise very strongly that the various Party Committees as described in the section on Party structure are not expected to duplicate the methods of division of work, departmental responsibilities, etc., of the higher Committees.

(ii) It is necessary to establish a method of leadership by the Executive and District Committees which relates the demands made upon Party organisations to the concrete situation of the particular organisation and to encourage the initiative and responsibility of the organisations in *applying* the general directive to their own circumstances. In addition it is necessary to stimulate throughout the Party the conception that the Party organisations and the whole of the membership have a vital part to play in the formulation of policy, which can have a tangible expression in resolutions to the higher committees, and the passing on of experiences gained in Party work.

Outstanding Problems which need Further Consideration and a Separate Statement.

In addition to the above proposals, it was recognised that there were certain outstanding problems which would necessitate the continued existence of the Organisation Commission. The main problems outstanding are :—

(*a*) The problem raised above on the character of leadership by Party leading Committees, the method of division of work and responsibilities, and relations with the basic Party organisations, etc.

(*b*) Problems involved in organising the development of the Party in new areas hitherto untouched, and amongst new sections of the people.

(*c*) Problems involved in the conduct of the Party Congress, the method of election of the Executive Committee, the application of the delegate principle in the election of Party Committees, representation at Party Congress, etc.

The Organisation Commission will continue its work on these questions and would welcome contributions on any of these points.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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